

# Things fall apart

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



In *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, there are unceasing tragic events that lead up to the death of the main character, Okonkwo. Throughout the novel, Okonkwo seems to be 'falling apart' as events intensify. At first, it was just his fear of becoming an 'agbala' like his father, and then it escalated on to killing his adopted son, Ikemefuna, to his exile to Mbanta, the arrival of the Christians and the white men, and ending with his devastating death. The question is, was Okonkwo's death to no avail? According to the events following the murder of the court messenger, Okonkwo did die in vain. The way the Umofians reacted after the murder, and how the situation turned out to be, clearly show that his death was unsuccessful and worthless. After Okonkwo murdered the court messenger, the Umofians reacted a completely different way than he thought they would. At the end of Chapter 24, Okonkwo explains his attempt at starting a war with the white men as ineffective because the Umofians had "let the other messengers escape. They had broken into tumult instead of action" (188). He had been trying to defend his clan and his traditions from being eradicated by the white men and Christianity, but his effort was to no avail. His passion and dedication to protect their Igbo traditions might not have been for the right reasons, though. From the beginning, Okonkwo had always been "afraid of being thought weak" (59), so to show his manliness and superiority, he prefers to defend his values and tradition as an act of self-preservation, than submit to a new world full of strange laws and a new order. Without the action of the Umofians, his murder of the messenger was a failure, and that led him to believe that he had become everything he had always despised; he had become his father. In no way, has his attempt to

create a war influenced anyone at the scene, and in the end, his act of suicide has no more of an impact than the murder of the court messenger. So, yes, he does die in vain. This whole idea of the reason of his death is extremely significant to the work as a whole because it clearly shows how minimal his endeavor impacted the imperialism of Africa by the Christians. His death is also very significant to the novel because of how greatly his devotion was to be everything other than an agbala, a coward, or a failure, and in the end just ends up looking or feeling like that because of his non-existing influence or superiority to the Umofians. In the end, he did not cause a war or a halt in the imperialism by the Christians. It actually did the contrary. The murder might have brought up some conflict, but it didn't. His suicide on the other hand, influenced the wrong side. When the District Commissioner is taken to see Okonkwo's cold, dead body hanging from a tree, Obierika describes Okonkwo as "one of the greatest men in Umuofia" (191). White men, though, saw him as another uncivilized and cultureless savage that could easily become just another story for their "Pacification of the Primitive" (191). Okonkwo's suicide was just a reason for the Commissioner to take Obierika and the kinsmen to court, and to eventually have them accept their subordination. Even though Okonkwo's purpose was to be greater than the white men and to not have to go through change, the white men still take over, are still interested in civilizing them, and change still happens. His death didn't change the thoughts of his friends of him and it certainly didn't change the minds of the white people of colonizing Africa. In conclusion, Okonkwo's life, his actions before his death, and his suicide cause him to die in vain because his purpose was not fulfilled. The novel was

definitely a tragedy with a terrible event after another, and Okonkwo may be seen as the tragic hero of the story because of his disastrous death like many of the others in Greek tragedies. He might have caused an influence on his family and friends, but the prevention of change by the white men was not put to action. Christ was born and change had to be made to accommodate him and his people, and there was nothing anyone could do to impede it.